



“MY FORM HAS TAKEN A REAL SLUMP AT THE MOMENT”

Sport psychology consultant **Helen Davis** looks at how to stay positive when you aren't performing at your best

You have experienced success in swimming, but at the moment no matter how hard you try, something is missing. Once consistent, your form is now characterised by a downward spiral, with worsening performances in the water. You don't want to lose confidence, but the reality is your form has taken a slump. This article focuses on how to stay positive, celebrate the

successes and keep the belief that your form will improve in the future.

WHERE IS YOUR FOCUS?

Working as a sport psychologist, it is noticeable how many athletes have a tendency to focus on what they don't want, rather than what they do want. Consider your focus when problems in swimming arise – what do you tend to focus on? Aim to narrow your focus

on what you do want to happen. If you are currently experiencing a slump in form and not feeling fulfilled in swimming, now is the time to focus on wanting better form and having joy in swimming again. It is all about how you choose to think.

HOW DO I THINK?

One of the best starting points for change, is to adopt a strength-based perspective. This perspective will teach you how to positively adapt to your slump in form. By choosing to think about it in a different way, it can give you a new sense of what matters most in the process of managing your slump in form. Aim to have strength-based improvement conversations with yourself and others using positive emotions. These are conversations

NOW IS THE TIME TO FOCUS ON WANTING BETTER FORM AND HAVING JOY IN SWIMMING AGAIN

that focus on your internal strengths and resourcefulness and less on your weaknesses and shortcomings. The key is to take advantage of positive emotions (such as joy, gratitude and hope) and regard them as your 'resources.' This positive resource-based approach has the accumulating advantage of converting anxiety and stress that arises from the 'pressure to improve,' into a mindset based on 'I have an opportunity to improve.'

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

When we feel positive, we are generally more open-minded, receptive to new ideas, adaptive and flexible. For example, the joy of engaging in physical activity sparks the urge to swim, interest in a new sport sparks the urge to explore, contentment that comes from a hard-fought victory sparks the urge to savour. The broadened mind-set arising from these positive emotions is contrasted to narrowed mind-sets sparked by negative emotions and their associated tendencies; such as to attack or flee. In other words, when we are more negative we are less able to consider alternatives, experiment with ways of doing things, and consider options. This approach will not help you moving forwards from a slump. Promote your direction to positive emotions to help build your individual personal resources

Helen Davis is a swimmer and sport psychology consultant who works with individuals, teams and coaches on their sporting performance.

Each month, Helen will suggest psychological techniques to help overcome difficult open water swimming scenarios.
www.thinkbelieveperform.co.uk
[@helenDav2245](https://twitter.com/helenDav2245)



BUILDING YOUR RESOURCES – WHAT TO DO

Keeping it positive

Taking a positive approach to a slump in form offers a different lens that helps us to move on from a preoccupation with the 'slump'. Being positive changes the scope or boundaries of your mind and can widen the possibilities you can see.

Knowing your strengths

A strengths-based approach embraces an intention to appreciate and understand your own gifts and talents. It is an intention to develop a deeper understanding of your own learning agenda, sense of self and purpose.

What is going well?

Document your swims, learning what worked, went well and noticing improvements. Work on building your form using your strengths more frequently and confidently. Aim to generate a climate of positivity around your swimming, be more open-minded and resilient to change.

Support network

Use your support network to help encourage and motivate you to notice your strengths.

Fostering enjoyment

Reflect on why you enjoy swimming, putting your enjoyment first, rather than your lack of form. Remind yourself of why you love swimming again.

Remember the time

Think back to a time when your form was good. Ask yourself positive questions after memorable swims or good performances, focusing on how your form was achieved. Study and celebrate successes both small and major, individual and collective, then build on these victories.

WHAT TO AVOID

Be aware of your thinking in your process to make changes; here's what to avoid:

AVOID QUESTIONS where you continually ask yourself what is wrong with your form rather than what is right. They are thoughts about problems rather than achievements.

AVOID THINKING of all the things you want to get rid of, eliminate and fix with your swimming; this requires a considerable investment in mental energy and does not move you forwards.

AVOID OVERTHINKING, as when we focus on problems, we begin to construct a world in which problems are central and these can burden you every time you swim.

MAKE A CHOICE TO BE POSITIVE

So, if you are finding that you have a slump in form, **make a choice** to use your experience, knowledge and inquiry processes to **increase your capability** to act positively and apply this to improve your swimming. Fuelled by positivity and the use of your **strengths** you can reveal new **insights** and understandings for positive and **sustainable action**; which, in turn, might just help you overcome your slump and give better, more **consistent form**.

